

Promoting a safety culture at worksites

I REFER to the article "Danger from above and below" (*The Star*, July 4) and would like to offer my views on the issue of safety at construction sites.

As the Chief Executive Officer of the company that is developing what is currently the biggest infrastructure project in the country, I take full and ultimate responsibility for the incidents that have occurred at MRT sites.

Safety at my worksites is something I have to ensure all the time, for both the public and my workers as well.

Coming from a conglomerate background, imposing a comprehensive standard operating procedure (SOP) for safety, health and environment (SHE) is second nature to me.

However, I realised that despite the SOPs, what was practised at site was not necessarily aligned to the SOPs. In general, standards with regards to safety sit between unsatisfactory to outright appalling.

Of course things have changed slightly for the better. I am now less likely to see workers not wearing safety helmets compared to about

two years ago. I look at it as a move in the right direction.

The situation is largely blamed on the construction industry relying on "instant workers" from overseas. However, I also detect a general lackadaisical attitude towards SHE best practices in the industry.

This has resulted in supervisors not enforcing SOPs, and employers not taking remedial action when safety practices are not followed.

Without a culture of safety, SHE procedure adherence becomes a chore which is followed only when the eyes of independent supervisors are present.

Since I helmed the MRT Project, I have made it my mission to change this. We all know what a gargantuan task it is to change attitudes but I believe that at the very least, this change can start with the MRT Project.

SOPs and regulations on safety have been introduced for all activities related to the MRT Project, both on and away from the worksite. We have introduced the Contractor Performance Assessment System (Compas) where SHE is one of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

measured when assessing the performance of our contractors.

MRT Corp has made it a point to ensure enforcement of SOPs with sufficient supervision and checks on sites. I have also made weekly unannounced site visits a practice.

Swift investigations are carried out when safety incidents occur. If negligence is found, the contractor is immediately terminated.

There is now a blacklist of contractors which are not allowed to be appointed for any future MRT related work.

The blacklist now has four companies. Furthermore, 14 personnel have been removed and final warnings have been given to 21 workers.

For MRT Line 2, we will be imposing a higher standard for SHE to mitigate risks. I have also been seeking out professional bodies in the construction industry for support.

This has borne some result as MRT Corp now has an MoU with the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) where it helps MRT Corp make the MRT Project the benchmark in the construction

industry in terms of safety.

We have started discussions with global organisations to initiate an independent audit of our SHE practices on site. The aim is to identify the weak points and strengthen them, while improving on the good systems already in place.

I am aware that what I am trying to do is just a drop in the ocean. My attempt to introduce a culture of safety may be akin to moving mountains!

However, I will not be discouraged. I know it is not an impossible task because such high standards have been successfully implemented in other sectors, such as the oil and gas industry.

I would like to assure the public that we continue to be vigilant about SHE standards at our sites. The process may take time, but we are already on it.

I hope that in the end, both the project and the industry will benefit from our initiatives.

**DATUK WIRA AZHAR ABDUL
HAMID**
Chief Executive Officer
MRT Corp